



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE, state and federal law enforcement arrests numerous gang members and other associates during a two week period as part of a one year anniversary initiative

Since the initiative began in February of 2005, Houston has had over 47 arrests since May of 2005

HOUSTON--Federal agents with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office here, in partnership with the Houston Police Department (HPD), the Harris County Sheriff's Department (HCSO), Alcohol Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATFE) arrested nine gang members during a two week period under a national initiative dubbed "Operation Community Shield" (OCS).

These arrests were the latest under the auspices under "Operation Community Shield (OCS)", a comprehensive ongoing initiative launched by ICE roughly one year ago to disrupt and dismantle transnational violent street gangs in the United States. Operation Community Shield represents the first time the federal government has used immigration and customs authorities combined in a national campaign against street gangs.

Over the past year, Houston has arrested over 47 violent street gang members. Just in the past two weeks, nine gang members have been arrested. The numbers of arrests nationally are 2,388 members of 239 different gang members. Since May of 2005, Houston has arrested over 47 violent criminal gang members. Many of these gang members were Mara Salvatruchas, Latin Kings, Southwest Cholos, Lo Vatos, and many facing federal prosecutions for re-entry after deportations and other crimes including murders, rapes and aggravated assaults with deadly weapons and drug charges.

"We at ICE use both the criminal and the administrative immigration laws to remove gang members from our streets. I would like to remind all those who are in the U.S. without inspection is a federal criminal violation." Said Bob Rutt, ICE's special agent-in-charge. "We will also not allow criminals from other countries to seek refuge in the United States."

ICE offices nationally conducted arrests throughout the United States including Houston (9), San Diego (41), Washington, D.C. (22), Miami (22) and Raleigh North Carolina (19). Gang members were also arrested in locations such as Sioux Falls, S.D., Des Moines Iowa, Falfurrias, Texas and Corpus Christi, Texas.

In recent years, the number of criminal gangs in the United States has grown, while the gangs themselves have become more vicious and widespread. Among the most violent and rapidly growing of these street gangs is the Mara Salvatrucha organization – better known as MS-13.

Fighting the proliferation of the MS-13 organization is a public safety priority for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which is why ICE launched **Operation Community Shield** in January 2005. Operation Community Shield is a national law enforcement initiative that brings all of ICE's law enforcement powers to bear in the fight against MS-13.

Under Operation Community Shield, ICE works to

- Identify violent gangs and develop intelligence on their membership, associates and organizations.
- Deter, disrupt and dismantle their operations by tracing and seizing their cash, weapons and other assets.
- Prosecute and, whenever possible, deport gang members from the United States.
- Partner with other law enforcement agencies at the local, state and federal level – both in the United States and in other countries – and federal prosecutors to develop a “force multiplier” effect in investigations and other law enforcement actions against gangs.
- Conduct outreach efforts to boost public awareness about the fight against violent *gangs*.

If you would like to report suspicious activity you may call ICE's toll-free line at 1-866-DHS-2ICE.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.